

# Barn Owl

## Ontario Government Response Statement



Photo: istockphoto

### PROTECTING AND RECOVERING SPECIES AT RISK IN ONTARIO

Species at risk recovery is a key part of protecting Ontario's biodiversity. Biodiversity – the variety of living organisms on Earth – provides us with clean air and water, food, fibre, medicine and other resources that we need to survive.

The *Endangered Species Act, 2007* (ESA) is the Government of Ontario's legislative commitment to protecting and recovering species at risk and their habitats. As soon as a species is listed as extirpated, endangered or threatened under the ESA, it is automatically protected from harm or harassment. Also, immediately upon listing, the habitats of endangered and threatened species are protected from damage or destruction.

Under the ESA, the Ministry of Natural Resources (the Ministry) must ensure that a recovery strategy is prepared for each species that is listed as endangered or threatened. A recovery strategy provides science-based advice to government on what is required to achieve recovery of a species.

### GOVERNMENT RESPONSE STATEMENTS

Within nine months after a recovery strategy is prepared, the ESA requires the Ministry to publish a statement summarizing the government's intended actions and priorities in response to the recovery strategy. The recovery strategy for Barn Owl was completed on February 18, 2010.

(<http://www.mnr.gov.on.ca/stdprodconsume/groups/lr/@mnr/@species/documents/document/286962.pdf>)

The response statement is the government's policy response to the scientific advice provided in the recovery strategy. In addition to the strategy, the response statement is based on input from stakeholders, other jurisdictions, Aboriginal communities and members of the public. It reflects the best available traditional, local and scientific knowledge at this time and may be adapted if new information becomes available. In implementing the actions in the response statement, the ESA allows the Ministry to determine what is feasible, taking into account social and economic factors.

The Barn Owl is a mid-sized owl that is easily identified by its white heart-shaped face. In Ontario, most Barn Owl sightings and nesting records have been within 50 kilometres of the north shore of Lake Erie and the adjacent Lake Ontario shoreline. Habitat loss has contributed to the Barn Owl's decline in Canada. Harsh winters, predation, road mortality and the use of rodenticides may have also affected populations.

## MOVING FORWARD TO PROTECT AND RECOVER BARN OWL

The Barn Owl is listed as an endangered species under the ESA which protects both the animal and its habitat. The Government of Ontario has demonstrated its commitment to protecting the Barn Owl by prescribing its specific habitat in regulation. The ESA prohibits any damage or destruction of that habitat without authorization. Such authorization would require that conditions established by the Ministry of Natural Resources be met.

The government's goal for the recovery of the Barn Owl is to protect and conserve the species and its habitat.

Protecting and recovering species at risk is a shared responsibility. No single agency or organization has the knowledge, authority, or financial resources to protect and recover all of Ontario's species at risk. Successful recovery requires inter-governmental co-operation and the involvement of many individuals, organizations and communities.

In developing the government response statement, the Ministry considered what actions are feasible for the government to lead directly, and what actions are feasible for the government to support its conservation partners to undertake.

### GOVERNMENT-LED ACTIONS

To help protect and recover the Barn Owl, the government will directly undertake the following actions:

- Educate other agencies and planning authorities on the requirement to consider the protection of the Barn Owl and its habitat in planning activities and environmental assessment processes.
- Encourage the submission of Barn Owl data to the Ministry of Natural Resources' central repository at the Natural Heritage Information Centre.
- Undertake communications and outreach to increase public awareness of species at risk in Ontario.
- Protect the Barn Owl through the ESA and enforce the regulation protecting the specific habitat of the species.
- Support conservation, agency, municipal and industry partners to undertake activities to protect and recover the Barn Owl. Support will be provided through funding, agreements, permits (including conditions) and advisory services.
- Establish and communicate annual priority actions for government support in order to encourage collaboration and reduce duplication of efforts.

## GOVERNMENT-SUPPORTED ACTIONS

The government endorses the following actions as being necessary for the protection and recovery of the Barn Owl. Actions which are noted as “high” will be given priority consideration for funding or for authorizations under the ESA. The government will focus its support on these high priority actions over the next five years.

**Focus Area:** Protection and Management

**Objective:** Identify, protect and conserve suitable habitat, including increasing the availability of nest sites in existing or historic locations.

**Actions:**

1. **(HIGH)** Develop best management practices for protecting Barn Owls and their habitat and promote the implementation of these practices to landowners, farmers and conservation partners.
2. **(HIGH)** Identify priority sites to engage landowners in the stewardship of Barn Owl habitat and associated grassland areas.
3. As opportunities arise, support the securement of Barn Owl habitat through existing land securement and stewardship programs.
4. Evaluate the effectiveness of nest boxes and continue to implement this program if deemed appropriate.

**Focus Area:** Research and Inventory

**Objective:** Improve understanding of Barn Owl distribution and abundance, as well as the factors that may limit recovery of the species.

**Actions:**

5. **(HIGH)** Develop and implement a survey protocol for Barn Owl sightings and reports of active nest sites that engages volunteers (e.g., through the use of surveys, the Web, or a hotline).
6. Evaluate the effects of factors that may limit recovery of the species (e.g., predators, use of rodenticides, road mortality) and develop potential mitigation approaches.
7. Investigate the tolerance level of Barn Owls to winter severity.

**Focus Area:** Awareness

**Objective:** Increase public awareness and support for the protection of Barn Owl and grassland habitat.

**Actions:**

8. Develop and deliver targeted communication products to promote public awareness of protection, conservation, reporting opportunities and habitat requirements of the Barn Owl in Ontario.
9. Co-operate with recovery initiatives that target grassland ecosystems and species at risk to share information and seek opportunities to build on existing activities.

## IMPLEMENTING ACTIONS

Financial support for the implementation of actions may be available through the Species at Risk Stewardship Fund, Species at Risk Farm Incentive Program, or Community Fisheries and Wildlife Involvement Program. Conservation partners are encouraged to discuss project proposals related to the actions in this response statement with the Ministry of Natural Resources. The Ministry can also advise whether any authorizations under the ESA or other legislation may be required for undertaking the project.

Implementation of the actions may be subject to changing priorities across the multitude of species at risk, available resources and the capacity of partners to undertake recovery activities. Where appropriate, the implementation of actions for multiple species will be co-ordinated across government response statements.

## REVIEWING PROGRESS

The ESA requires the Ministry to conduct a review of progress towards protecting and recovering a species not later than five years from the publication of this response statement. The review will help identify whether adjustments are needed to achieve the protection and recovery of the Barn Owl.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We would like to thank everyone who participated in the development of the "Recovery Strategy for the Barn Owl in Ontario" for their dedication to protecting and recovering species at risk.

### **For additional information:**

Visit the species at risk website at  
[ontario.ca/speciesatrisk](http://ontario.ca/speciesatrisk)  
Contact your MNR district office  
Contact the Natural Resources Information Centre  
1-800-667-1940  
TTY 1-866-686-6072  
[mnr.nric.mnr@ontario.ca](mailto:mnr.nric.mnr@ontario.ca)  
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